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SERMON

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

MRS. CHLOE B. LESURE.

BY REV. W. WARREN,
PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN UPTON.

PUBLISHED BY THE FRIENDS.

MILFORD:
PRINTED AT THE WEEKLY JOURNAL OFFICE.
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MRS. LESURE,

THE DAUGHTER OF JOHN STARKWEATHER, M. D.,

WAS BORN IN UPTON, MASS., APRIL 9, 1816.

WAS MARRIED TO J. H. LESURE, NOVEMBER 4, 1840.

DIED NOV. 16, 1853, AGED 37.

MEMENTO MORI—REMEMBER DEATH.

SERMON.

RETURN UNTO THY REST, O! MY SOUL.—PSALM 116:7.

The soul was made for rest as well as for activity; and its real end and highest good are gained by the enjoyment of its appointed rest, no less than by the discharge of its appropriate duties. God is the soul's true rest. He consents to become its portion, its enduring peace, its ennobling, blissful repose.

The text is the language of weariness and discontent. It is the soliloquy of a soul that had wandered away from its appropriate rest. It is the voice of the dove that had gone forth over all billows in search of rest, but found none. It is the language of a spirit that had hovered long and tiresomely over shifting scenes and eluding prospects, or had held its exhausting flight through weary wastes, to reach a vanishing good. It proposes to itself, at last, to return to its rest.

What expression more fit to become our watchword in life's conflicts or loneliness, than this? What words better become the lips of the weary as they lie down to sleep at night, than these? What language more suitable to one who languishes in the pursuit of earth's perishing pleasures, or constitues a more fitting farewell to time's delusive vanities, than this? Or how can the departing spirit better dismiss the circles and scenes of earth, and breathe itself forth into eternity, than in the gentle utterance of these inspired words?

It was my privilege a few nights since, to stand by the bed-side of a christian who was returning to her rest. The summons came to me, at midnight, to hasten to that peaceful room. Nature was not clothed in gloom; no storm nor hurrying winds disturbed the peaceful hour. The rays of the full moon made the night into the semblance of day. To her rest! It was her chosen rest; chosen not in the straitened hour of death, nor in the pressing alternatives of life, but in the more favored periods of earlier days, when other hopes and joys and cares surrounded her, and urged themselves upon her choice. These were among her last words; and that they might be used at her burial, as descriptive of her best wish for herself and others, was her last known request. We propose to take up these words on this occasion. We will not indulge in flights of fancy now. We have no need to do it. We shall not start any adventurous theories or speculations, nor propose for discussion, themes of profound inquiry, nor ask you to pursue any labored course of thought, or track of investigation. We prefer rather to follow the simplicity and sublimity of this inspired passage. The soul here turns its eye inward, and converses with itself, and utters the earnest self-injunction:— Return to thy rest; for,—

This weary path, this languishing flight, can never lead to rest. Thy course leads farther and farther off from true peace. Dangers throng and thicken around thee, as thou dost press thy way onward in this fruitless, languishing, perilous flight.

Thou hast strayed from thy *centre*. As the star, wandering in space, diverges farther and farther from its central orb, and pursues its course into realms of unbroken night, *thou*, too, hast left thy centre, the great orb of thy being, for an untried track, an untraversed course of lawless, rayless existence. Thou hast left the perfections around which God made thee to revolve. The white throne from which the urns of heaven are filled, and the unsetting suns there receive their effulgence, and from which, in their majestic circles and sublime courses, they never break away—thou hast left. Return to thy centre, or thy loss will be greater than of the brightest star, or the extinguishment of all that shines or beams above.

Return to thy *light*. God is the light of the soul. Turned away from Him, darkness is its dwelling-place. Leaving the light of his countenance, breaking away from the circle of his presence and glory, to revolve about other centres and other orbs, the soul wanders and perishes. Thou hast left the Sun of suns, the Light of lights. How great the darkness that has shut down upon thee! What mistakes have followed this thy infatuation! Ten thousand evils and errors have been the consequence of leaving this great light of the world. A darkened understanding, a bewildered imagination, deep moral blindness have been the result. Delusion has made sport of the mind and the fancy. Lights and shapes,—which the great moral Sun alone could displace by the calm

prospects of unclouded hope,—have haunted thy fears, and filled thy sickened fancy. Return unto thy light; for thou hast made darkness and gloom thy home.

Return to the *arms of protection.* Thou hast broken away from the pale of God's covenant, from the field of his bright promises. Thou hast gone into forbidden and perilous paths, where no pledge of protection is proffered. Thou hast gone into the depths of danger, into the thickest arrows of death. Thou hast made temptation thy covert, and casualty and peril thy companions. Return to thy rest in the bosom of God. Thy course leads through every frightful danger. The stream upon which thou dost sail is broken by rapids and fearful falls. The sea which thou wouldst navigate is a sea of storms, of gaping whirlpools and shore-lined wrecks; its depths are paved with the dead. The lands over which thou dost wander, and the heights up which thou wouldst climb, are broken with fearful precipices and unsounded depths. The heavens into which thou wouldst vainly tempt thy flight, are the abode of the prince of the power of the air. His arrows irradiate them with the gleams of death; his angels and emissaries scour them to intercept the course of every fugitive from God, and hinder their flight to his throne, and thus make them his sure prey. "Return to thy rest, O my soul!" For thou hast gone from thy home, from the arms and bosom of protection, into the depths of darkness and death. Return to the all-embracing arms of protection and love.

Return to the *path of obedience;* left at the fall, in the person of thy federal head, and assumed and followed out in thine own freedom. Rest cannot be found in wasting thy powers. Reckless of repsonsibilities, there can be no peace to the soul. Rest is the result, the boon of labor.

It is the reward of weariness *in* the work—not *of* the work—of love.

The path of disobedience is the path of disquietude and restlessness. He that goes away from God embarks upon a sea of tempests, of troubled waves, of devouring depths. He enters an atmosphere freighted with storms and elements of destruction. Break the strong bands of obedience, fly from the circle of duty and subjection to God, cast off the claims of Heaven upon the service of thy hands and the homage of thy heart, and there is no rest for thee in the universe. Return therefore, to the orbit of obedience, to the shining circle of duty in the divine presence and service. Otherwise, fear and foreboding will disturb thy days and nights on earth, and a fearful doom, and more fearful destruction will await thee at death.

Return to the *possession of a peaceful hope.* To the selfish and disobedient, hope is infatuation! The orbit of hope is wholly within that of obedience and duty. Its star shines only in the light of the greater sun. It is more than a mere moon, encircling a wandering planet that visits a sunless, rayless region of night. It is indeed, the handmaid of obedience, the secondary of duty;—but it is more,—it is the beaming forth of Christ, formed within us the hope of glory. Hope has also its unsanctified forms—its earthly, selfish aspects. It is easy naturally to hope.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

And half the hopes of earth are phantoms. All will die as the taper light, or break as the hollow bubble, save those that are kindled at the throne of God—the light of immortality. Who then, would not leave the shadow for the substance,—fading stars for ever brightening suns! Return my soul, to the possession of this peaceful hope.

Return to thy home of *calm enjoyment*,—of undisturbed tranquility. The happiness of impenitent minds is feigned —is counterfeit. Carnal security is a delusion, a delirium. The joy of forbidden indulgence is a cup, sweet indeed, upon the surface, but bitter in the depths, and death-giving in its dregs.

"But where can rest be found,
Rest for the weary soul,
'Twere vain the ocean-depths to sound,
Or pierce to either pole."
"'Tis found alone in Heaven."

Return therefore to thy rest, O my soul! For thou hast strayed from thy God. Take up this inspired soliloquy, as appropriate to thyself. Thou hast strayed from thy centre, from thy light, from the open arms of protection and care, from thy peaceful hope, and the home of pure happiness. Ruin awaits thee, destruction will swallow thee up, if thou dost not return. *For thou hast strayed.* And—

2D. EVERY MOTIVE CONSTRAINS THEE TO RETURN.

All interests, all arguments, all influences, and all reasons constrain thee. Thy rest is heaven;—heaven begun here, and inherited hereafter. Away from God there can be no rest to the soul; nothing terrestrial is peaceful, nothing future and final can inspire hope. At a distance from thy rest, everything combines to disturb and terrify thee. Death, the first and the second, frightens thee. The future forebodes nothing but evil to thee, the present to thine eye is but a wreck-bound sea. Not even the pillow at night can give thee rest, nor the bosom of home by day. Life's richest blessings,—dear children, kind friends, bright honors, rich treasures,—all these, if possessed, fail to afford thee rest; but if taken away, the heart

is wrung with anguish. Departed from God, the soul is miserable, *without* these, and discontent and unhappy *with* them. Nor can exclusion from society, nor retirement from the world give rest to the alienated mind. Go from the business and cares of the world. Fly from amusement, from the haunts of vice, and scenes of revelry; turn away from the tempting goal of ambition, and still rest is not found. The repose of age, the accumulation of comforts, the calm of years, the dignity of honors, the praise of virtues and immortal deeds cannot give thee rest; cannot quiet the restless conscience, nor yield the soul a solid satisfaction. Nor can the sleep of death afford peace to the unreconciled disquieted spirit; there is no place in the universe where the wanderer from God can find rest. Earth has none, nor the sea, nor the abyss: heaven offers none, nor the wings of the morning. It is not in the stillness of the grave. A troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt is the fountain of such a spirit. Try the changing joys of childhood; take up its toys one by one, and play with them. Try the exhilarating pastimes and enchanting prospects of youth, let these ravish you. Take up the heavy burdens and golden honors of manhood; or pass into the enfeebled repose of age, and hast thou found satisfaction? Art thou at rest? No, the deep river of rest runs only from the throne of God. The rays of its peaceful hours and hopes beam only from the fount above. Away from thy rest in God, the waves of that heavenly river can never reach thee; the ocean of that celestial light can never bathe thee.

And then, thy farther wandering will make thy return all the more difficult and doubtful. Other attractions are multiplying themselves around thee, to draw thee farther and swifter away from God. And distance does but weaken

the attractions of his throne, while the accumulating power of habit and the acquired force and velocity of vice are multiplying themselves around thee, and are urging thee on swifter and swifter to ruin, just in proportion to the distance of thy departure from God. And still other weights and spells are pressing upon thy spirit, to smother its life, and overcome its feeble forces and wavering resolutions to return. Come home, then, to thy rest, O my soul, while thou mayest, before thy powers are more enfeebled, and wasted, before thy chances are more diminished, and the probabilities of thy return are become still less and less.

Influences exerted to change thy choice and induce thee to return, lose their power just in proportion to the number of times they have been exerted, and have failed. Every thing now favors and facilitates thy return. God is propitious,—is on a mercy-seat, and ready to exhaust the varieties and resources of his grace to win thee back to Him. The love of Christ, his life, his death and resurrection unite to constrain thee to return. The Spirit adds new attractions and heavenly influences to bring thee home to thy rest. The Divine purposes are all golden cords,—not to hinder, but to draw thee to the skies. The very air is filled with voices, the ocean and the elements with anthems, earth and heaven with agencies, and the whole domain of thought and feeling with arguments and motives, to work upon the convictions, to charm the ear, to touch the heart, and win the wandering soul back to God. Every teaching providence, every touching event of time, each marked vicissitude and returning kindness is meant to awaken attention and interest, and allure thee back to the arms of love. Every text of Scripture, the falling tear of sympathy and sorrow, each pulse of hope and joy and fear has a voice that cries to the soul to return to its

rest. Every rising sun and setting day calls aloud to the earth and its inhabitants to return to their great source and centre in God. Nor is conscience silent upon this subject. She points her flaming finger, of most significant aim, into the future, and warns the soul of a hastening retribution, and of fearful destruction, if its course be not changed. The inward forebodings also, respond to the appeals of conscience, and echo to the cry of all things, in every world, of every form and variety of remonstrance, and lift their loudest call to the wandering soul, in its perilous distance, to hasten home to God.

Is influence to be desired here? Is a course of usefulness to be preferred to a career of injury and harm to others? Are the great ends of existence worth attaining? Is pure and perpetual peace worth possessing? Is hope a desired and glorious boon to the soul? Is Heaven a home to be preferred rather than the fire that can never be quenched? Are its songs and joys to be desired rather than the wailings of woe? Then return, O my soul, to thy rest. Haste, haste thee to thy home.

We forbear to pursue this self-converse any farther. The soul astray from God may well take it up, and continue the soliloquy, till self-persuaded under the influence of heaven, it returns to God.

But I have another use to make of these words. I remarked near the commencement of the discourse that no words could be more appropriate to a soul that was taking its leave of earth after a life of sacrifice and faithfulness, than these. I now recall your thoughts to that dying scene. The room where that spirit plumed itself for its flight to heaven, was "privileged quite beyond the common walks of life." It was indeed no ordinary christian that left us on that morning for her

rest in heaven. And it will be expected that we briefly glance at her qualities and characteristics.

Mrs. Lesure was endowed by nature with an *original* and *discriminating mind.* Her thoughts had an inquisitive and searching aspect. She loved knowledge for its own sake, and was willing to expose her ignorance to gain it. Nor would she ever try to hide her ignorance under the mantle of mere words. She never would yield assent to what she did not comprehend; nor respond to a statement or sentiment till she understood it, and saw the rightfulness of it. Education in her case had done much to develop and adorn her powers. Life to her was a discipline, a school.

But her *moral perceptions* were still more keen and severe. I have rarely met with one so uniformly conscientious. She governed herself by principle. To persuade her to a course of action, you had first to persuade her that it was right; and to dissuade her from a course of conduct, you had only to prove to her that it was wrong. And yet, I have seldom known a person more open to conviction, more charitable towards others, or tolerant of opposite opinions. She had the rare quality of perceiving what pertained to the rights of others.

She was a very severe critic upon herself. She had a salutary but troublesome perception of her own imperfections. Of these she was very impatient. Her own faults, which she was, perhaps, prone to magnify, she looked upon as diseases or deformities, which she could not bear to see, or endure. I shall be pardoned here for alluding to what fell under my own eye not long since. A donation of second-hand books, to a missionary object, had been made in this place. I was examining those books to see if they were all suitable to be sent abroad;

and in looking over an excellent volume, I noticed pencilings upon the margin; which I found to be the diary of one who was dealing with herself with unsparing severity. Here *this* fault was noted down, with a record of tears and prayers that followed. Here *that* impatient act or word was recorded, with the season of fasting, or the severe penalty inflicted. There *another* inadvertence or omission of duty was set against herself, with the deep sorrow and heart-probing severity accompanying it. Here was a glance at the moral discipline practiced by one who has gone to her peaceful rest.

But her charity for others equalled her severity upon herself. How rarely was she ever heard to speak evil of another, or impute a false motive to an act which would admit of a good one. Who has ever known her to take pleasure in hearing or rehearsing evil tidings and rumors. She had much of the charity that hopeth all things, that thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.

She was characterized by *simplicity and artlessness.* There was a daylight truthfulness and transparency in her character. She could afford to be natural. She had less need of arts and disguises, less need to be constrained and artificial than is common. She had an instinctive hatred of hypocrisy and deceit, especially in herself. She was what she seemed to be; nor did she wish ever to be taken for what she was not. Duplicity she was slow to pardon, and still slower to practice. Her honesty and faithfulness often seemed like severity, but her wounds were the wounds of a friend, and the balm of her charity was always at hand to heal.

She was *disinterested.* Throughout her protracted sickness she constantly cared for others. How many little things she remembered, and performed, or bestowed

by her own hand, which most persons would have thought it pardonable to neglect! The poor and the needy she remembered in her little bequests. The neglected, the forsaken and sorrowful, she visited, when her strength and life were well-nigh wasted.

Her concern for the kingdom of Christ increased to the last; and she made provision before her death, to continue her membership to several benevolent societies. She felt for all the great interests of the world. If her charities had ever, for a time, become exclusive, she clearly saw and readily retracted the error, as dangerous to herself and opposed to the benevolence of the gospel. It was delightful to see her recovering from tendencies that none more deeply regretted than herself, and expanding her sympathies again to embrace every sufferer of the human family.

For fifteen years she was a follower of Christ; and who amongst us brought less of reproach upon his cause? She was retiring rather than obtrusive in her nature and tastes. If she did not hide her light under a bushel, she was inclined to hide from her left hand what her right hand did. She took enlarged views of Christian responsibility and consecration. Her standard being high, she found it difficult to attain to it. With her, life was a literal warfare, and death a triumphant victory. Her very inquisitive cast of thought was quite as much the result of an insatiable thirst for religious knowledge, and an earnest seeking for light upon the path of duty, as of any original tendencies in her mind. And her rigid course of self-discipline, her habit of tasking her powers in Christian effort, and of inuring herself to sacrifices, did not follow from defective views, or the opinion that there could be any merit in these things, but from a high view of the Christian standard, and a deep sense of Christian responsibility. She was often troubled with periods of

darkness and doubt; then her sun would break forth suddenly from its gloom-clad sphere, and fill her soul with light and joy. In health her hope was but a crescent, but in her last days it became full-orbed. When her disease had fastened upon her, she consecrated herself to Christ anew. From this time she became perfectly calm and peaceful. She had remarkable views of her Saviour. It seemed to her, at one time, that she was even in the garden with him; that his locks literally fell upon her shoulders; that she felt his very breath upon her cheek, and heard the soft murmuring waters of the brook Kedron.

During the terrific storms of the last week, she had great enjoyment. They were as an anthem to her soul. They no doubt suggested to her the storms of life, which she had passed; the calm haven of approaching rest, that mirrored upon its surface the peaceful glories of the New Jerusalem. The next morning she repeated the beautiful hymn:—

"Hide me, Oh my Saviour hide,
Till the storm of life is past."

When her last hour came, she asked her father, (a physician,) if she was dying; saying "you need not be afraid to tell me, for I am not afraid to die." To another, she said, "Tell every one that I am happy." To another, "I charge you to meet me in heaven."

She requested us to sing the sweet words—

"Vital spark of heavenly flame,
Quit, Oh quit, this mortal frame.
Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying,
Oh, the pain, the bliss of dying.
Cease, fond nature, cease thy strife,
Let me languish into life."

She then calmly fell asleep.

"So fades a summer cloud away,
So sinks the gale, when storms are o'er,
So gently shuts the eye of day
So dies the wave along the shore."

I have nothing to add by way of consolatory address to this circle of bereaved friends. I said what I had to say to you, when you followed that dear one to the grave. Her truest biography was written while she was living. It was written by herself;—not, indeed, upon parchment or paper, but on living tablets—upon feeling hearts, in her own useful, cheerful, loving life. That life was long—for it was a life of goodness, and "answered life's great end." The life of virtue only hath immortality. Choose for yourselves that Saviour, whom she loved and imitated and honored, and you will meet her in heaven.